

## 2019 Through the Bible Reading: *Bible Study Support*

The Book of Numbers	
Background (Who, what, why, when)	<p>The English title "Numbers" comes from the two censuses that were taken at the beginning and end of the book. The Hebrew title is "In the Wilderness," which is more descriptive of the book's content. The storyline is designed according to the stages of Israel's journey. The book of Numbers begins after their Exodus from slavery in Egypt. The first section begins as they complete a one-year stay at Mount Sinai (Ch. 1-10). Israel then departs Sinai being led by God (Ch. 10-12) to arrive in the Wilderness of Paran (Ch. 13-19). The Israelites then they set out to travel again (Ch. 20-21), with the book ending its final chapters as Israel settles in the Plains of Moab (Ch. 22-36).</p> <p>The book opens with a census, where all the tribes are numbered. God's people are given laws about how the tribes of Israel are to be arraigned. When the cloud of God's presence lifts from the tabernacle, God guides Israel into the wilderness. Immediately, things start to go bad. The people begin to complain about their hunger and thirst and they want to return to Egypt. Additionally, Aaron and Miriam oppose Moses in front of all the community. Israel then arrives in the Wilderness of Paran, which is about halfway to the Promised Land. Moses sends out twelve spies to scout the Promised Land. Ten of the spies return saying there is no chance of taking over the land. Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, are convinced that God will save them and deliver His promise. This causes Israel to get scared and want to return to Egypt. The people plan to appoint a new leader and overthrow Moses. God is upset with the people, but Moses intercedes on their behalf. He calls God to be faithful to His promises to Abraham. God does remain faithful, but not at the expense of His justice. He sentences this generation to wander in the wilderness for forty-years until they die, only their children will get to enter the Promised Land. After this, Israel rebels again as a group of Levites challenge Moses and Aaron's leadership. God is not happy about this, and He deals severely with them. God then renews His commitment to Moses and Aaron as Israel's leaders. Israel continues to complain in the following chapters about their thirst. God tells Moses to speak to a rock to bring out water. However, Moses dishonors God by striking the rock and putting himself in God's place. The same fate falls on Moses as the wilderness generation; he too will die without entering the land. After this, Israel rebels yet again. This time, God brings judgment on the community in the form of venomous snakes. Moses again intercedes for the people, and God tells Moses to make a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole. Whoever looks at the snake will be healed of the poison. The final section of the book of Numbers covers Israel in the Plains of Moab. The first part of this section focuses on the King of Moab &amp; Balaam, a pagan sorcerer. The King of Moab is scared of Israel, being such a large people group, traveling through his territory. The king hires Balaam to pronounce curses on Israel. Three different times, Balaam finds that he cannot curse them; he can utter only blessings upon Israel. Then God gives Balaam a vision about a future Israelite King who will one day bring God's justice to all the nations. The rest of the book focuses on the children of the wilderness generation. They begin to prepare to inherit the Promised Land. A new census is taken of the new generation. They go on and win a number of battles with the people groups around them, and a few tribes begin to settle in the Promised Land. The book ends with the new generation poised to enter the land, and Moses is about to deliver his final words of wisdom</p>

	and warning.
Interesting Facts in Numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Author: Moses</li> <li>• Time Written: 1450-1410 BC</li> <li>• Chapters: 36</li> <li>• Verses: 1,288</li> <li>• Numbers has also been called: Book of Journeying, Book of Murmurings, Fourth Book of Moses</li> <li>• Numbers covers almost 39 years: Ch. 1:1-10:11 covers about 21 days, Ch. 10:1-33:38 covers about 38 years, Ch. 33-36 covers about 6 months</li> <li>• Numbers records the tragic story and consequences of Israel's unbelief</li> <li>• An 11 day journey turned into 40 years of wandering</li> <li>• Numbers has more than 80 claims that "the Lord spoke to Moses"</li> <li>• The mission of the spies lasted 40 days</li> <li>• The Israelites numbered about 2.5 million people</li> <li>• The word wilderness is used in the book over 40 times</li> <li>• If a person touched a dead body, they were to be considered unclean for a whole week (Num 19:11)</li> <li>• Miriam, Moses' sister, was temporarily stricken with leprosy for speaking out against Moses (Num 12:2)</li> </ul>
Reasonable Defense for Numbers	<p>Why should we read the book of Numbers today?</p> <p>1. Read the book of Numbers to get a thorough history of Israel's early days. The book contains many statistics, population counts, tribal and priestly figures and other numerical data. Numbers records the people's long wandering in the desert of Sinai, their time at the oasis of Kadesh-Barnea, and their eventual arrival at the banks of the Jordan River across from the Promised Land.</p> <p>2. Read the book of Numbers to get a renewed sense of God's delight in obedience. He is our God, too, and He wants us to live righteously, worshipping Him through our words and works. The book of Numbers reveals how God reminded Israel that He does not tolerate rebellion, complaining, and disbelief without invoking consequences. He taught His people how to walk with Him—not just with their feet through the wilderness but also with their mouths in worship, hands in service, and lives as witnesses to the surrounding nations. He was their God, they were His people, and He expected them to act like it.</p> <p>3. Read the book of Numbers to understand God's faithfulness. In this book, the people of Israel tested God's patience, and He in turn tested their endurance and faithfulness. Though the people failed many times, God showed His own faithfulness by His constant presence leading the way: through a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.</p>
Memory Verse	"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." Numbers 6:24-26
Practical Application to memory verse	As believers, we need to seek face-to-face intimacy with God. This is the type of relationship that allows you to hear God's small still voice. This will help fill your drive to be committed to a Spirit-filled expression of your gifts.
Life Application from Biblical Themes in Numbers	In Numbers 2, there are laws about how the tribes of Israel were to be arranged in their camp. The tabernacle was to be at their center, around that

were the priests and the Levites, and around them were the 12 tribes neatly arranged with Judah at their head. This was all an elaborate symbol about how God's holy presence was at the center of their existence as a people.

Numbers 5-10 is a series of laws that developed the purity laws from the book of Leviticus. If God's presence was going to be in their midst, every effort should be made to make the camp pure, a place that welcomes God's holiness. If we want to be in God's presence, we should make every effort to keep our lives pure of sin. Our bodies should always be treated as a temple that welcomes God's spirit.

In Numbers 21, God brings judgment on His people in the form of venomous snakes. God tells Moses to make a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole. Whoever looks at the snake will be healed of the poison. This story speaks to the challenge the God has by being faithful to His covenant. He is right to bring justice on the Israelites' evil and sin. But even His justice gets transformed into a source of life for those who will look to God for healing. God will always remain faithful to His promises. And even when experiencing negative consequences to our very own choices, we must still look to God to be the source of our healing.

Throughout the book of Numbers, we continue to see Israel rebelling in the wilderness. The stories continue getting worse and worse of the people's rebellion. God brings partial acts of judgment on Israel, but He also keeps showing mercy by providing food and water. The Balaam story shows God's grace in bright colors. Israel is down in the camp grumbling while in the Plains of Moab. But up in the hills, unbeknownst to them, God is protecting and blessing them in the face of the King of Moab. It's this contrast of God's faithfulness vs. Israel's rebellion that made these stories so important for later generations. The wilderness stories are told time and again by prophets, poets, and the apostles. These stories always serve as a warning, that God will remain faithful to His covenant promises, He will also allow His people to walk away in rebellion to face the consequences.

Do you see any resemblance between the grumbling, rebellious Israelites and yourself? How can you avoid following their example? With humility and sincerity, pray for a soft heart, open to God's guiding hand.